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ПРОГРАММА ОРГАНИЗАЦИИ ОБЪЕДИНЕННЫХ НАЦИЙ ПО ОКРУЖАЮЩЕЙ СРЕДЕ

UNEP

Background Paper (Revised)
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HARMONIZATION OF INFORMATION MANAGEMENT AND REPORTING FOR BIODIVERSITY-RELATED TREATIES

Note by the Executive Director

I.   Introduction

1.   At its first meeting on 22 January 2001, the Environmental Management Group (EMG) discussed the issue of harmonization of national reporting and agreed to establish an Issue Management Group (IMG) dealing with this issue (Decision 3). UNEP was invited to serve as task manager, focusing on biodiversity-related conventions while considering the relevance of biodiversity-related aspects of other MEAs. The IMG was asked to look at this issue comprehensively, taking into account issues such as the best use of lessons learned, the composition of the group and the number of the countries to be used in a pilot phase. UNEP was asked to provide EMG with its recommendations at its next session.

2.   This background paper serves two purposes. It provides a report to EMG on the action taken relevant to this decision since the first EMG meeting, and it sets out a series of recommendations on action to be taken in the coming months to work towards greater harmonization of reporting and information management for biodiversity-related treaties.

3.   An earlier draft of this paper provided the basis for an EMG Issues Management Group teleconference on 7 June, which included the participation of the secretariats of four global biodiversity-related treaties (CITES, Convention on Migratory Species, Convention on Wetlands and the Convention on Biological Diversity). Input was subsequently also provided by the secretariat of the World Heritage Convention and , as well as additional input from the participants in the teleconference.

4.   This paper will provide the basis for a report to the UN Secretary General as part of the preparation of documentation and other preparatory activities called for in UN General Assembly resolution 55/198 on enhancing complementarities among international instruments related to environment and sustainable development. This is in preparation for the review of implementation of Agenda 21 to be carried out in 2002 at the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD).

5.   Effective co-ordination and management of MEAs is one of the critical issues that need to be addressed under international environmental governance, which will be discussed in depth at the WSSD. This meeting is seen as a critical opportunity to advance further international co-operation for sustainable development on the basis of concrete commitments at the highest level.

6.   In preparation for the summit, the Governing Council has established an open-ended intergovernmental group to undertake a comprehensive policy-oriented assessment of existing institutional weaknesses, as well as future needs and options for strengthened international

environmental governance. The report of this group, which will include input from MEA secretariats, will be reviewed by the next session of the Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum, which will provide guidance to the tenth session of the CSD (the preparatory body for the WSSD) on future requirements of international environmental governance in the broader context of multilateral efforts for sustainable development.

II.   Definitions

7. For the purposes of this paper, the following definitions apply. The two terms are clearly not mutually exclusive:

   (i)   Streamlining: The streamlining of national reporting is defined as those mechanisms that make each individual reporting process or an integrated process easier or more straightforward for contracting parties to implement.

   (ii) Harmonisation: The harmonisation of information management and reporting is defined as those activities that lead to a more integrated process and greater potential for sharing information.

III.   Needs and benefits

8. As MEAs have multiplied, the number of reports and other information required from parties to those agreements has also increased significantly. Many countries, both developed and developing, have regularly expressed concern about the burden this imposes.

9. Reporting to MEAs serves a variety of purposes:

   (i)   Reports allow the governing bodies of agreements to assess implementation so as to be in a position to make rational decisions on future priorities and needs, and to provide, or guide the provision of, additional support where it is required.

   (ii) Reports may contain very specific information. For example the CITES annual report is very specific in providing the information necessary to determine the nature and volume of legal trade (also providing indication of potential illegal trade).

   (iii) Contracting parties are also frequently asked to provide other information beyond regular reports, such as expanded detail on specific issues, case studies and experiences, in order to support development of advice to contracting parties, and to promote the sharing of information between parties.

10. Apart from the concern of reporting burden, there are strong concerns that the full value of the information gathered is not being realised due to limited access and lack of comparability. Multi-purpose use of information provided in national reports (e.g. for national, regional or global assessment and planning) would be of significant benefit to national governments as well as facilitating interagency approaches and actions.

11. Benefits of harmonization of reporting could accrue to all stakeholders, including national governments, MEA secretariats and governance bodies, and the world community. Some of these potential benefits include *inter alia*:

   (i)   To national governments
   - encourage identification of a consolidated list of obligations cross-sectorally
   - identify national priorities on implementation of MEAs in a holistic manner

- encourage participation of all levels of government in implementation and reporting
- improve awareness of national obligations and compliance of MEAs
- improve ability to assess achievement of treaty objectives and set future priorities
- identify gaps in national legislation and policies
- assist in annual budget preparation
- identify ways to avoid duplication of efforts between institutions
- facilitate preparation of national strategic plans to implement MEAs
- reduced burden of meeting reporting requirements of treaties
- improved information available through secretariats
- increased ability to develop and use clearing-house mechanisms and integrated indicators of sustainability
- improved efficiency and effectiveness of national biodiversity information systems
- improved ability to implement country-driven action responding to MEA commitments

(ii) **To MEA secretariats**
- encourage and support governments in the implementation of their own national priorities
- timely receipt of national reports, enabling the Secretariats to prepare analyses that help the conferences of parties to assess achievement of treaty objectives and identify future priority issues
- improved efficiency of information management
- improved efficiency in the use of information technology and communications
- improved integrated analysis capacity and improved ability to coordinate interagency programmes of work, through sharing of information and experience
- improved linkages with international environmental monitoring agencies, major data custodians, and regional treaties
- improved basis for decision making by COPs, subsidiary bodies and secretariats

(iii) **To the world community**
- improved awareness of emerging issues and inter-relationships
- global and regional overviews
- reliable and comparable information for research

IV.   Mandate

12. <u>UN General Assembly</u>: Resolution 55/198 welcomed the work of convention secretariats and contracting parties in enhancing complementarities among international instruments related to environment and sustainable development, and encouraged further efforts to strengthen cooperation and to streamline national reporting. This built on earlier resolutions of the General Assembly, including resolutions 54/217 and 53/186 which also encouraged convention secretariats to address practical issues including more effective exchange of information and supporting efforts at the national level towards adopting an integrated approach to implementation of environmental and environment-related conventions.

13. At its nineteenth special session, the UN General Assembly, by its resolution S/19-2, adopted the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21. The programme included a recommendation that the conferences of parties to the conventions signed at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development or as a result of it, as well as other conventions related to sustainable development, should cooperate in exploring ways and means of collaborating in their work to advance the effective implementation of those conventions.

14. Commission on Sustainable Development: Consistent with paragraph 38.13 of Agenda 21, the Secretary-General has made a number of recommendations concerning the streamlining of national reporting (E/CN.17/1997/6), including the establishment of reporting calendars and the use of the Internet, which the Commission has actively implemented in its subsequent reporting cycles following acceptance of the report by the Commission (Decision 5/103).

15. UNEP: The Nairobi Declaration on the Role and Mandate of UNEP (1997) identifies one of the core elements of the UNEP mandate as being to develop "coherent interlinkages among existing international environmental conventions". This, and other parts of the UNEP mandate concerning coordination of environmental activities in the UN system, give a clear mandate for UNEP to lead efforts to promote synergies among the biodiversity-related treaties. This is further supported by Chapter 38 of Agenda 21 and UNEP Governing Council Decisions 17/25, 18/9, 19/9c and 20/18b.

16. Further to adoption of UN General Assembly decision 52/445, the Secretary General established the UN Task Force on Environment and Human Settlements, chaired by the UNEP Executive Director. The task force recommended that UNEP continue to support joint meetings of heads of convention secretariats in order to ensure complementarity and synergy (consistent with paragraph 38.22(h) of Agenda 21), and that arrangements be made for periodic joint meetings of representatives from conventions to address cross-cutting issues. The task force report was submitted to the UN General Assembly as an annex to A/53/463, and noted in resolution 53/242.

17. Convention on Wetlands: Resolution VII/4 of the Conference of Parties (May 1999) requests the Ramsar Convention Bureau to collaborate in efforts to harmonise information management among the environment-related conventions, and in particular to assist the proposed pilot testing of a streamlined approach to national report preparation. Further to this, the Strategic Plan 1997-2002 includes a number of actions concerning the reporting process and the implementation of processes for regularly reviewing the efficiency and effectiveness of all Ramsar Convention institutions, mechanisms and programmes.

18. Convention on Migratory Species: The Information Management Plan adopted by Resolution 6.5 of the Conference of Parties (November 1999) requests the Secretariat to liaise with information managers of other global biodiversity-related treaties on streamlining information management and reporting, and further stresses the importance of increased harmonization within CMS and its related agreements. Operational objectives within the Strategic Plan for 2000-2005 are also concerned with data required for decision making (2.7) and institutional linkages with partner organisations (4.4).

19. CITES: The strategic plan (Strategic Vision Through 2005) and report adopted by the Conference of Parties (April 2000) gives renewed emphasis to the importance of cooperation and interlinkages with UNEP and other biodiversity-related conventions (Goal 5). Particularly relevant are the two objectives that deal with this issue (5.1 and 5.2). In addition, Goal 1 of the strategic plan is concerned with enhancing the ability of each party to implement the convention, which includes improving the availability of information on which decisions are made (1.4 and 1.5).

20. Convention on Biological Diversity: Decision V/19 of the Conference of Parties (May 2000) requests the Executive Secretary to proceed with the further development and implementation of the proposals for streamlining national reporting, in collaboration with the secretariats of the other biodiversity-related conventions. Further to this, decision V/20 is concerned with the development of a strategic plan for the Convention, which is certain to also cover these issues.

21. World Heritage Convention: UNESCO's intergovernmental World Heritage Committee has recognised the collective interest that would be advanced by closer co-ordination of that convention's work with other international conservation instruments, as specified in the committee's Operational Guidelines paragraph 139. Specific mention is made of co-ordination and information sharing.

22. Regional seas: Decision 28 adopted by the UNEP Governing Council at its 21st session requested the Executive Director to use global meetings of regional seas conventions and action plans and other cost-effective consultative mechanisms in the further strengthening of regional seas programmes and for building synergies and collaboration among environmental agreements. More specifically, the Secretariat of the Cartagena Convention has memoranda of understanding with the CBD Secretariat and the Ramsar Convention Bureau which specifically refer to "exploring the possibility of recommending procedures for harmonising, to the extent desirable and practicable, the reporting requirements of Parties under those instruments and conventions".

V.   Overcoming barriers to harmonization

23. Full harmonization of reporting and information management amongst the MEAs and related agencies cannot be achieved instantly. Some of the potential barriers to success include:

   (i)   *At the national level*
   - fragmented responsibility for national biodiversity information management
   - limited understanding of the link between reporting and efficient implementation of MEAs
   - lack of sufficient communication between implementers on the ground and national focal points or administrative authorities
   - differing focal points and stakeholders involved in the implementation of different MEAs at the national level
   - jurisdictional conflicts in implementation of MEAs on the ground
   - limited funding and human resources for information management
   - different reporting formats, timing and purposes

   (ii)   *At the international level*
   - limited funding and human resources for information management
   - lack of capacity to participate in so many fora on harmonisation and interlinkages of MEAs
   - danger of duplication and overlapping considering the number of agencies and organisations carrying out activities related to this issue
   - uncertainty or debate that makes standards (such as taxonomies) difficult to achieve
   - differing economic, legislative, social, administrative, and statistical systems of contracting parties
   - different reporting formats, timing and purposes

24. Some of the reasons that make harmonization desirable also contribute to making it difficult to achieve. Progress in harmonization must recognise these barriers and consider ways of surmounting them. It is therefore important at one time to have a strategic view, that is to have a common inter-agency view of an ultimate desirable outcome or target, and at the same time to take progressive, pragmatic, achievable steps that move towards this target.

25. Overcoming the barriers requires:
   - clear understanding of the purpose and benefits at all levels

- interagency cooperation
- multi-national cooperation
- information and experience sharing
- wide consultation with stakeholders
- progressive and incremental steps through pilot projects that solve practical problems
- adoption of tested procedures for wider implementation

26. It is important to appreciate that harmonization does not imply standardisation, but rather approaches that enable the gathering and integration of information for multi-purpose use. Attention should be paid to lessons learned and the successful pragmatic approaches already taken by major agencies, and adopt these as interim measures while true international standards evolve where these are necessary.

27. A balance must be achieved between prescriptive reporting, and the recognition that national reporting should be an integral part of existing national economic and social accounting processes. Reports should be the output of the information management processes required for effective implementation of agreements at the national level, not the result of a separate exercise.

VI. Strategic approach

28. Scope: The scope of this paper and the actions proposed is the harmonisation of information management and reporting for the global and regional biodiversity-related treaties, and biodiversity-relevant aspects of other multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs).

29. Vision: A harmonised and streamlined approach to information management and reporting for the biodiversity-related treaties and programmes that ensures efficient and effective compilation, management and use of information, reducing duplication of effort at national and international levels, and increasing synergy in the use of information.

30. Objectives: The following short and medium-term objectives are recommended for future implementation of this work:

Short term objectives
(i) To test and review the opportunities and needs for a range of potential mechanisms for increased streamlining and harmonisation

(ii) To provide supporting tools and demonstration actions which will assist both contracting parties and secretariats in the process of streamlining and harmonising

Medium term objectives
(iii) To review the results of the tests and identify how to implement them in the context of the needs and governance structures of the different MEAs

(iv) To identify further actions to be taken at the national and international levels to increase streamlining and harmonisation, including *inter alia* capacity building at the national level

(v) To increase the availability of information resulting from these changes to support all MEA implementation activities including increasing public information and awareness

31. National involvement: In order to ensure that appropriate measures are developed and ultimately adopted, it is essential to involve in the harmonisation process all national institutions responsible for implementation of the different MEAs on the ground. This will ensure that the

measures proposed are meaningful at the national level, and also ensure that there are contracting parties who can "champion" particular approaches in the various MEA governance fora.

32. Interagency cooperation: It is essential that international agencies cooperate closely in ensuring increased access to the information necessary for implementation of MEAs, whether this is information obtained through the reporting process or other means. Increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of use of information at all levels should be a major objective of all international agencies, including MEA secretariats.

33. Consultation: In order to ensure interagency cooperation and taking advantage of lessons learned, the strategy should include wide consultation not only amongst the biodiversity MEAs and their contracting parties, but beyond to other related MEAs and international agencies experienced in the field (for example trade-related organisations have experience of direct relevance to CITES). Furthermore, consultation within countries, between the different agencies and institutions responsible for the implementation of MEAs is a key issue.

VII.   Pragmatic approach

34. Achievable targets: Harmonisation should progress by emphasising short-term achievable targets. Opportunities to make gains should be taken where there is subject matter that lends itself easily to harmonised approaches, or where some nations have found solutions that can be replicated or adapted to similar conditions.

35. Pilot projects: Pilot projects should involve a few countries, or narrow subject matter areas that can demonstrate proof-of-concept. These should be carefully chosen so as to be likely to succeed in a relatively short time frame, and should not merely be demonstrations or models, but be designed to address specific and current needs, with a view to adaptability to differing situations. In this regard approaches taken should be linked to existing schedules, standards and commonly used formats.

36. Indicators of success: Clearly defined indicators of success should be defined for each pilot project or incremental implementation step, and all pilot projects should have critical assessment and review before expansion, adaptation or replication.

VIII.   Progress to date

37. There are many initiatives relevant to harmonization of reporting and information management for the biodiversity-related treaties. The following examples are indicative of the type of work being done by a wide range of international agencies.

38. Commission for Sustainable Development: At their sessions during 1994-1997, the Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development (IACSD) discussed the issue of harmonising national reporting. They concluded that the issue was difficult to address for a number of reasons relating to whether the report was voluntary or binding in nature, variations in periodicity and the nature of the information requested. IACSD recommended that the next step that needed to be taken was to streamline the requests for information that were being made to national governments.

39. For some years the Commission has made every effort to encourage countries to submit their reports on the implementation of Agenda 21 in electronic format, and provides guidelines and forms for completion. The information received through the reporting process is compiled in the UN system-wide sustainable development website, where information can be accessed on a country-by country or issue-by-issue basis. In addition to this, an interactive database on

national information is being developed to facilitate submission of national reports to future CSD sessions as well as to optimise the use of national reports and therefore the exchange of information.

40. <u>UNDP and the Rio Agreements</u>: In 1997, UNDP convened an expert meeting to explore ways to create synergy between and among the Rio Agreements. This meeting was based on two fundamental principles developed in consultation with participants and stakeholders, including representatives of the Secretariats of and Parties to the instruments:
    * that a recognition of potential synergies among the instruments must be an integral part of the planning process and implementation for each; and
    * that strengthening and building in-country capacity is essential to the producing synergy in the implementation of the agreements.
    Working Group 4 covered the issue of information and reporting requirements, and recommended a number of key actions for national and international attention. These recommendations are built into the actions proposed in this paper.

41. <u>Feasibility study</u>: In 1998 the five global biodiversity-related treaty secretariats and UNEP commissioned the then World Conservation Monitoring Centre to undertake a feasibility study to identify opportunities for harmonising information management between the treaties. The study considered approaches towards development of a harmonised information management infrastructure for the treaties within their existing defined mandates. Its purpose was to consider how the secretariats could improve effectiveness and efficiency in gathering, handling, disseminating and sharing information, and the secretariats have made some follow up since that study was completed. The study recommended a range of actions incorporated into this paper.

42. <u>UNEP</u>: The UNEP Division of Environmental Conventions convenes regular meetings of convention secretariats to promote coordination between them, and has also organized several expert meetings on collaboration and inter-linkages. UNEP's five priorities for work in this area are: promoting information exchange amongst secretariats; strengthening collaboration amongst the conventions' scientific and technical bodies; revitalizing support to the regional seas conventions and action plans; making international trade and environmental regimes more compatible; and streamlining national reporting. UNEP produces a *Synergies* bulletin twice a year, which aims to promote collaboration on environmental treaties.

43. <u>UNEP Environment and Natural Resources Information Network</u>: This programme helps to build capacity for making the environmental assessments needed for state of the environment reporting. It promotes co-operative networks at the regional level that can serve as conduits for the flow of data and information needed for regional and global assessments, policy making and planning.

44. <u>UNEP workshop</u>: In October 2000, UNEP convened a workshop to explore ideas for a more harmonised approach to national reporting to international agreements and to develop pilot projects for testing these ideas at national and international levels. The workshop was attended by representatives of eight convention secretariats, eight countries and several international organisations involved in exploring the potential synergies between international agreements and programmes. The results of this workshop and the progress since on the development of pilot projects to test approaches to harmonisation of reporting are covered later in this paper.

45. <u>UNEP Biodiversity Planning Support Programme workshop</u>: In May, UNEP and the Foundation for International Environmental Law and Development convened a workshop on "Legislative Complementarity and Harmonisation of Biodiversity-related MEAs". The workshop was attended by representatives of the CBD and other biodiversity-related treaties, and nine

countries. The objective of the workshop was to discuss key areas of overlap and synergy between the biodiversity-related conventions, as part of a programme to:

- facilitate a harmonised, integrated and cost-effective approach to implementing the CBD and other biodiversity-related conventions at the national level
- contribute to improving policy, legal and administrative co-ordination at national level in order to comply effectively with international obligations
- publish and dissemination of a set of best practice guidelines on co-ordinated implementation of biodiversity-related conventions at national level

46. United Nations University: The UNU and its partners have convened two conferences (one global, one regional) to assist in the development of a synergistic and coordinated approach to environmental policy making that takes account of existing inter-linkages between environmental issues. Objectives were to: create awareness at the public, governmental and intergovernmental levels of the importance of synergies and coordination between MEAs; survey existing initiatives; foster discussion and interaction among international institutions, scholars and other relevant stakeholders who can cooperate to identify and examine opportunities; and identify concrete mechanisms, next steps and feasible win-win paths forward on this important issue. The main outputs were recommendations on the promotion of inter-linkages between MEAs in the areas of harmonization of information systems and information exchange, finance, issue management, scientific mechanisms, and synergies for sustainable development. Those recommendations related to reporting and information management are incorporated into this paper.

47. European Environment Agency: The EEA is working on a range of projects that are looking at reporting obligations and mechanisms at national and community level. These include the following:

(i) The EEA Reporting Obligations Database currently under development aims to inventory all obligations, both legal and moral, resulting from reporting requirements and expectations as a categorized and key-worded series of questions or information elements requested.

(ii) As part of EIONET, the EEA is testing mechanisms for compilation of information from multiple sources over the Internet, particularly for use in "state of environment" type reporting for the European region.

(iii) The EEA is also working on a project which aims to streamline reporting mechanisms for the 64 environmental agreements to which the European Community itself is party.

48. Convention secretariats: The secretariats of the global biodiversity-related treaties are aware of the need to increase access to the information that they manage, and to streamline and harmonisation information management and reporting. For example:

(i) CMS: Over the years CMS and its various agreements have developed approaches to reporting and information management that, although similar, are not integrated. The CMS Secretariat is now leading efforts to synthesise and integrate the information contained in the national reports provided to the secretariats, and is developing a more integrated approach to reporting on migratory species. CMS is also following Ramsar in moving towards reporting more closely linked to the strategic plan. The more thorough synthesis of the national reports is also leading to a helpful review of implementation.

(ii) CBD: The CBD Secretariat has taken a lead in ensuring that not only are all the reports submitted to the secretariat available online, there are also search tools that facilitate

access to the information that the reports contain. In addition, the second round of national reports are formatted to provide a checklist of those actions that a Contracting Party is obliged or requested to undertake as a result of Convention Articles or conference decisions, moving away for a text-based report to a questionnaire.

(iii) <u>Ramsar</u>: For many years the Ramsar Convention Bureau has provided Parties with clear guidance on how to prepare national reports. In 1999, 107 out of a possible 110 Parties submitted national reports (three were exempt), and all of these reports are available online. The guidelines have evolved over the years, and now focus tightly on the strategic plan. The latest version of the reporting tool is now also being developed as a planning tool for implementation of the strategic plan at the national level.

(iv) <u>CITES</u>: CITES has provided "Guidelines for the Preparation and Submission of CITES Annual Reports" since 1994 (comprehensively revised in 1999), and is now exploring how the quality of annual reports might be improved, how the data might be better presented and used, and how to ensure timely submission. The Secretariat has begun studying the submission rates and contents of biennial reports, with a view to developing guidelines for these reports too.

(v) <u>World Heritage</u>: The World Heritage Convention has only recently begun a periodic reporting process, and is currently reviewing the results of regional reports for Africa and the Arab states, with a view to learning from what has been done so far. Experiments are beginning on reporting using web templates, and some discussion has been entered into on linking this to management of information on individual sites on the Internet.

49. <u>Regional seas conventions</u>:

(i) <u>Nairobi Convention</u>: The Contracting parties to the Nairobi Convention, meeting in May 2000 to assess progress in implementation of the CBD Jakarta Mandate in the Eastern Africa region, compiled information country-by-country on the action taken. Their report, and the process used in compiling it, was presented as a potential model for all regional seas conventions and action plans to report to CBD on progress made in the implementation of the Jakarta Mandate.

(ii) <u>Cartagena Convention</u>: Discussions on reporting will take place at the next meeting of the Scientific and Technical Advisory Committee. The value of integrating the SPAW Protocol reporting process with the reporting to other biodiversity-related treaties is well understood, and consideration will be given to the formats and processes used by at least CBD, Ramsar and CMS and how to integrate with these approaches.

50. <u>State of Environment reporting</u>: The EEA, UNEP GRID Arendal and the Danish National Environmental research Institute have collaborated on development of the *State of the Environment Reports Information System* covering the Pan-European region. This is an internet based information service providing an overview of SoE documents (paper reports, internet versions and policy related products) developed by each country. The service also provides an overview of environmental issues and sectors treated in SoE reports, and information can be accessed by either issue or country in a similar manner to the UN system-wide sustainable development website.

IX.   Recommended actions

51. The following paragraphs provide a range of possible actions to be undertaken. Some are already underway, and others will require a major input of resources before they could be

undertaken. Each action is described further in an annex referred to in the text. It should also be noted that there are clearly interlinkages between the different proposed actions.

A.   Test methods of harmonising national reporting nationally and internationally

52. UNEP project: Following the recommendations of the workshop referred to in paragraph 40, UNEP is implementing a series of national pilot projects to assess different approaches to harmonised reporting for the global biodiversity-related treaties. These pilot projects will cover: consolidated reporting to a range of agreements; modular reporting approaches; and the link between reporting to international agreements and the state of environment reporting process. An additional pilot project will address information management to support delivery of reports, and assess the support that might be valuable from regional organisations.

[SEE PROGRESS REPORT IN ANNEX 1]

B.   Test a wider-scale harmonised approach for a specific theme or issue

53. Protected areas: Many international agreements and programmes designate or recognise sites for one reason or another. These include the World Heritage Convention and the Convention on Wetlands at the international level, and European Community "Directives" on birds and habitats and the various regional seas conventions and their protocols at the regional level. Many other international agreements and programmes identify national protected area systems as key tools for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity. The UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Centre is working with other UN agencies (particularly UNESCO and FAO) and with IUCN on a project to compile information on the world's protected areas in a way that meets the information needs of a wide range of agreements and programmes. This work is based on an ECOSOC resolution, and has the backing of the Ecosystem Conservation Group.

[SEE PROGRESS REPORT IN ANNEX 2]

C.   Identify ways to build on the related initiatives of others

54. Global Biodiversity Information Facility: The Global Biodiversity Information Facility (GBIF) has been established through an intergovernmental process with the aim of increasing access to the vast quantities of global biodiversity data that exists, particularly in museums and herbaria. The agreed programme priorities of GBIF are to: create an Internet-based catalogue of known names of species; digitise data on species information in museums and herbaria; create interoperability of databases and search engines for accessing these data; and build capacity in nations for implementation of GBIF. GBIF is essentially a scientific institution, and UNEP anticipates working alongside GBIF members in developing species information databases. Specifically, UNEP seeks, in co-operation with GBIF members, to enhance the quality and quantity of species-specific information available to convention secretariats and to contracting parties in support of implementation.

[SEE CONCEPT NOTE IN ANNEX 3]

55. Other initiatives: There is a wide range of other initiatives which could also be discussed, and where an effective dialogue with those managing the initiative might lead to their work better addressing the information needs of national governments and MEA secretariats. This includes, for example, the Biodiversity Conservation Information System (BCIS), and the developing regional information networks such as the Inter-American Biodiversity Information Network (IABIN).

D.   Integrate information management at the international level

56. Review existing information sources: There are many international information sources and services already available which support the development of policy at the national level, in

particular the development of policy relevant to implementation of international agreements. However these information sources and services are not necessarily all known to those who might use them, or complete. The UK Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions is therefore currently carrying out a project to review all of the available information sources and services, and to make recommendations on their better integration and areas where there are gaps.

[SEE PROGRESS REPORT IN ANNEX 4]

57. ECOLEX: Initially a collaboration between IUCN and UNEP, and now involving FAO, this Internet-based information service provides access to basic legal and adherence information on all of the environmentally-relevant international agreements (both global and regional). However this information is not linked to other information relevant to each of the agreements, and does not provide links to the websites of the convention secretariats. Also, at present, ECOLEX only includes international agreements and provides no links to the national legislation implementing each agreement within each country. Consideration needs to be given to how the existing service can be extended to serve the needs of convention secretariats and contracting parties.

[SEE CONCEPT NOTE IN ANNEX 5]

58. Species information: There are several components of biodiversity and the actions taken to conserve it that are relevant to a wide range of international agreements. For example, species are listed in the annexes to CITES and CMS, the Bern Convention and the EC Birds and Habitats Directives, the SPAW Protocol to the Cartagena Convention. Many other organisations also deliver species information over the Internet, including IUCN, UNEP (especially UNEP-WCMC) and numerous national agencies. In addition programmes on specific issues also deliver information such as the Global Register of Migratory Species, the Global Invasive Species Programme and the Association for Biodiversity Information. Collaborative programmes need to be developed to use the power of the Internet to link information in a manner that is useful. The ultimate aim is to develop integrated information systems that serve the needs of a wide range of international agreements and programmes.

[SEE CONCEPT NOTE IN ANNEX 6]

E.   Improve access to the experience of others

59. Case studies and lessons learned: Within the files and archives of MEAs are the valuable results of case studies, research projects and successful (and unsuccessful) practices related to habitat rehabilitation, legislative provision, species re-introduction, policy development, protected area management, sustainable tourism and so on. In many cases these are submitted in direct response to calls for case studies and other information. A number of tools are now available to make this valuable experience more accessible. Some of these case studies are already available through individual MEA websites, but not in a consistent or co-ordinated manner. The concept is to take steps to develop a "Lessons Learned Library" shared between the MEAs that provides a collection of relevant, exemplary case studies indexed and easily accessible.

[SEE CONCEPT NOTE IN ANNEX 7]

F.   Ensure that national reports and key assessments together cover the "Big Picture"

60. Assessing the "big picture": Between them the biodiversity-related treaties call for a wide range of reports covering a significant range of issues. But when all these pieces are put together, how complete is the picture of the status of the world's biological diversity and the actions taken to ensure its conservation and sustainable development? The aim of this concept is to review the reporting requirements of the key international agreements, with a view to identifying how the range of reports presents the "big picture", and what else would be required to complete it,

including information from other major assessment projects (Millennium Assessment, GEO, GIWA) and national level State of the Environment reporting.

G. Organised inventory of obligations

61. Reporting obligations: The aim of this project, which has already been initiated by the European Environment Agency, is to develop a detailed consolidated inventory of all obligations placed on contracting parties to report information to international environmental conventions. The information will be compiled in the form of an annotated list of specific information elements demanded (directly or implicitly) by each obligation instrument (convention, protocol, agreement, directive, etc). The obligations would also be key-worded using a standardised thesaurus as to subject matter, and linked to information on schedule and periodicity of regular reports. The inventory would be structured as a searchable database that links the information required to the text of the legal authority for the obligation (e.g. convention article or formal decision) and to geographic scope.

X. Other potential supporting and demonstration actions

62. The following paragraphs provide a range of possible additional supporting actions for investigation and consideration. Some of these are already underway, others would require an input of resources before they could be undertaken if they were thought to be useful actions.

63. Joint website of the biodiversity-related conventions: This webpage was established two years ago as a mechanism for locating related information on each of the five convention websites, but has fallen into abeyance. The website will be resurrected as a collaborative exercise between UNEP and the five treaty secretariats.

64. "Handbook" to reporting, incorporating existing formats, rationale and timetables: Reporting instructions for contracting parties vary widely between treaties. Contents specification, reporting formats, guidance and interpretation may be found in convention articles, decisions and resolutions of conferences of the parties and subsidiary bodies, and less formal guidelines and interpretation documents circulated by secretariats. A resource that provides in one place the relevant guidelines and formats for the biodiversity-related conventions would be of practical benefit, as well as being a tool to promote harmonisation. This resource could be a published book, but is likely to be more useful as an Internet resource, possibly linked to a CD ROM for those countries which have difficulties with Internet access and use.

65. Reporting timetables: MEA secretariats might give consideration to reviewing the reporting timetables of the MEAs with a view to more careful scheduling, which would in particular benefit SIDs and other countries with relatively small infrastructures. The information might also be presented in a reporting calendar on a regular basis.

66. All national reports accessible on the Internet: The concept is to introduce a common approach across the conventions for making available information submitted by parties. Some of the elements of this include the standardisation of the approach, format and linkages of secretariat web-sites, a shared website acting as a gateway to convention specific information and harmonised methods of document managing and archiving, so that the documents can be systematically searched, transparently across MEAs. Parts of this are already being implemented by some MEA secretariats, so there are already some lessons that can be built upon.

67. Metadatabase of official documents and information papers of MEAs: The development of a metadatabase (index or directory) is proposed that would provide a means to search for any official document (including national reports) of the MEAs selected by subject keyword, time period, region etc., and obtain overview contents and instructions on how to obtain the document. This would require an agreed vocabulary for keywording and a consistent document identification system across agreements.

[SEE CONCEPT NOTE IN ANNEX 12]

68. Harmonisation of terminology and classification: Important support for improved access to and usefulness of information would result from the development and/or sharing of common taxonomies, glossaries, lists of abbreviations, definitions and terminology, and the possible future adoption of cross-convention standards. Some of these, for example standard taxonomies, would be far more difficult to implement than others.

[SEE CONCEPT NOTE IN ANNEX 13]

69. Develop demonstrations of streamlined reporting through electronic means: Modern information technology has now reached a stage where it can routinely and reliably be used to make national reporting more efficient and effective. Actions are proposed to test out the use of electronic report submission, submission through prepared pro-forma reports, and multi-purpose reports with elements common to several MEAs, leading to a demonstration of the concept of "virtual reporting". This will build on and promote many of the activities already being carried out by convention secretariats, helping to ensure more wide use of the lessons being learnt.

[SEE CONCEPT NOTE IN ANNEX 14]

XI. Mechanisms for improving institutional interlinkages at the international level

70. Achieving many of the actions noted above and maintaining the successes will require standing linkages between the MEAs in a number of areas, including *inter alia*:
   - further harmonisation and interlinkages of websites and other information dissemination
   - consistency on information management practices and technologies
   - co-ordination of scientific methodology considerations (such as indicators)
   - co-ordination of the use of nomenclature, definitions, harmonisation of taxonomies, etc.
   - developing and co-ordinating a joint capacity building programme in information management and related Internet technology
   - management of a shared lessons-learned library

71. In the short term improved institutional interlinkages may be accomplished through the UNEP synergies meetings, *ad hoc* meetings of technical bodies of the MEAs, and collaboration between secretariats both bilaterally and multilaterally. In the longer term, structural changes are required to make these linkages effective and permanent. An assessment of needs for interagency standing subsidiary bodies is called for - particularly in the areas of information management. Unifying or sharing scientific support bodies should be examined as well, especially with regard to taxonomy. Also, recognising that secretariats often have limited resources in information systems, it potentially would be operationally efficient to jointly engage specialised service providers to support these endeavours.

[SEE RECOMMENDATIONS IN ANNEX 15]

72. Further to this, a key point to bear in mind is that harmonisation of implementation of the different MEAs is a far more important issue. Harmonisation of information management and reporting are tools for furthering this process. This paper deals with one part of a far larger issue.

XII.   National coordination mechanisms

73. Improved co-ordination of convention implementation at the national level is essential for efficient and effective response to all of the international obligations that countries have taken on. Integration of information management at the national level is one tool for achieving this, and for delivering reports in a better manner. Various mechanisms are used to work towards greater co-ordination at the national level.

74. Exchange of information: The national focal point (or equivalent) for each convention ensures that his or her counterparts for other conventions receive relevant information. This is a fairly passive process, and while it should lead to recognition of areas of potential overlap, it does not lead to a synergistic approach to implementation of the conventions. There is also the danger that divergent policies may develop on international issues. This sort of mechanism is unlikely to foster moves to streamline and harmonize reporting.

75. Periodic co-ordination meetings: The national focal points (or equivalent) meet periodically to exchange information and discuss areas of common interest. This is probably the most frequent mechanism for coordination currently, and can lead to a more integrated approach to convention implementation if properly managed. At its highest level, these meetings can discuss policy and issues ahead of meetings of the conferences of parties to ensure an integrated approach. These coordination meetings could also ensure a more integrated approach to reporting if given the right advice internationally.

76. Convention co-ordination office: An individual or group of individuals is assigned the role of ensuring coordination. This is an effective mechanism provided the individual has the necessary authority and budgets to ensure action can take place. One would assume that to be efficient it would probably be combined with periodic coordination meetings convened by the coordination office. Such a mechanism could certainly facilitate increased coordination in preparation and delivery of reports at the national level.

77. Common national focal point: An individual or a single team assumes the role of national focal point to more than one international convention. In small island states this is a common occurrence, but not in larger countries with more complex bureaucracies. The result tends to be that the individual is overburdened, but this has the corollary that he or she is very open to any action that increases harmonization and streamlining.

78. Integrated programmes and strategies: Development of a common approach to implementation of one or more international conventions within a country, with organisations working to a single integrated programme or strategy. This approach could be combined with any of the above-mentioned mechanisms, and would clearly lead to greater integration at the national level. This could result from or lead to greater integration and the international level. Finally, it is important to recognise that a key component of integration, whether of action, policy development or reporting, is the integration of information management that forms the basis for assessment, priority setting, decision making and reporting.

ANNEX 1

Testing methods of harmonizing national reporting nationally and internationally

Progress Report

I.   Introduction

1.   As the first step to address the need to harmonize reporting processes under Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs), UNEP is implementing a project entitled "Streamlined National Reporting under Biodiversity-Related Conventions: Pilot Case Studies in Selected Countries". The project is an umbrella project encompassing six pilot projects to be implemented with interested countries, including Belgium, Ghana, Indonesia, Panama, Seychelles and UK. UNEP is currently in touch with Spain to explore the possibility of its participation in the project.

II.   Scope of the project

2.   The biodiversity conventions included in the project are the five global conventions, i.e. the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), Convention on Wetlands of International Importance Especially as Waterfowl Habitat (Convention on Wetlands), Convention on Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS), and the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and World Natural Heritage (World Heritage Convention).

3.   The Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife (SPAW) Protocol under the Convention for the Protection and Development of the Marine Environment of the Wider Caribbean Region (Cartagena Convention) will also be considered in the pilot project of Panama.   If Spain participates, its pilot project will be supported by the Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment and the Coastal Region of the Mediterranean (Barcelona Convention) and could include addressing the reporting requirements under the SPAW Protocol of the Barcelona Convention.

III.   Summary of project aims and expected outputs

4.   The pilot projects will test the four main methods of streamlining national reporting that were identified in the workshop (October 2000, Cambridge) which explored ideas for a more harmonized approach to national reporting to international agreements. The workshop was convened by UNEP (Division of Environmental Conventions and UNEP-WCMC).

5.   Each pilot project will produce the following:

(i)   a report (or reports) that satisfy the reporting requirements under the biodiversity-related conventions to which the country is a Party for a selected period

(ii)   a report on the national reporting mechanisms (institutional frameworks and information/data flow) for the biodiversity-related conventions and in some cases, state of the environment (SOE) reporting, including:

●   description of the reporting mechanisms that exist and the information management systems used for the preparation of each report;

- description of the linkages between the reporting mechanisms for the biodiversity-related conventions (and in some cases the SOE reporting mechanism);

- gaps in information and data existing in the country;

- recommendations, including the necessary actions to be taken by the Government, on how to streamline the national reporting under biodiversity-related conventions and, in some cases, including the linkages with the SOE reporting mechanism, can be ensured or improved;

- recommendations on how the information management system for the reporting can be improved, including possible information support from outside the country.

6. Based on the results of the pilot projects the following outputs will be produced under the main project:

   (i) preliminary consolidated reporting format for the global biodiversity-related conventions.

   (ii) a set of guidelines on establishment of coordinated national reporting mechanisms for the biodiversity-related conventions.

   (iii) a report on regional mechanisms for supporting the countries to fulfill the reporting requirements under biodiversity-related conventions: the case of Panama and Central America.

7. It is intended that the analysis should also, in the future, help the COPs ensure that reporting requirements focus on the minimum set of useful data for implementation of the conventions.

IV. Implementation and financing of the project

8. The project will be implemented by the UNEP Division of Environmental Convention working in collaboration with the UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Centre (which will provide the necessary technical assistance) and with cooperation of the secretariats of the relevant biodiversity-related conventions. The project is funded by UNEP (US$135,000) with in-kind contributions of countries involved in the project and relevant MEAs. Further funding may be received from participating developed countries and other donor countries.

9. The pilot projects have been prepared in the form of draft Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) between UNEP and the participating developing countries. The draft MOUs were sent to the countries on 19 April 2001 as a basis for comment and further discussion. The developed countries will finance their own work and are considering supporting, both financially and substantively, the implementation of the pilot projects in the developing countries.

10. Paucity of funds has precluded the selection of more countries for the implementation of the project. An attempt has however been made to select one country from each continent. The selection of one Small Island Developing State (SIDS) - Seychelles - is significant. In most of SIDS there is usually one focal point coordinating, and reporting on, the implementation of several conventions.

ANNEX 2

Testing a wider-scale harmonized approach for a more specific theme or issue: protected areas

Progress report

I. Introduction

1. Over the past three years there have been a number of studies and meetings aimed at harmonizing and sharing information between international agreements and programmes. All stakeholders agree with the need for careful planning and cooperation in information management to ensure increased synergy in the use of information and reduced duplication of effort. Given the range of international agreements and programmes that are concerned either directly or indirectly with protected areas, there are clear opportunities for promoting and demonstrating increased harmonization of information management and reporting.

II. Scope of the project

2. The UN List of Protected Areas: Protected areas form part of each nation's strategy for dealing with the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and landscape. These areas vary considerably in their objectives, the extent to which they are integrated into the wider landscape, and the effectiveness with which they are managed, but they nonetheless provide powerful evidence of a nation's commitment to conservation and sustainable development. Recognizing the importance of such areas, the UN Economic and Social Council adopted Resolution No. 713 (XXVII) in 1959, which called for the preparation and maintenance of a list of national parks and equivalent reserves. The *United Nations List of Protected Areas* includes all national protected areas that meet certain criteria.

3. International agreements and programmes: A significant number of international treaties and programmes call on nations to protect or conserve areas for specific purposes. Many of these give international recognition to specific sites, for example the World Heritage Convention and the Convention on Wetlands are both concerned with protection of specific sites, and at least 11 other global and regional agreements and programmes recognize or designate specific protected areas. Other treaties define a need for protected areas without giving recognition to specific sites, for example Article 8 of the Convention on Biological Diversity requires each Contracting Party to "establish a system of protected areas or areas where special measures need to be taken to conserve biological diversity" and to manage them effectively.

III. Summary of project aims and expected outputs

4. The overall aims of this project are to report on the current status of the world's protected areas, and to promote the harmonization of information management and reporting for those international agreements and programmes concerned with protected areas.

5. This will be achieved through the preparation of a new-format *United Nations List of Protected Areas* which not only lists the world's protected areas and presents synthesis and analysis of the information, but also seeks to meet the related information needs of a range of international agreements and programmes concerned with protected areas.

6. There are two major events which provide a specific focus for delivery of the new format *UN List* and associated reports. These are:

    (i)   World Parks Congress: The Fifth World Parks Congress will take place in South Africa in September 2003. This ten-yearly meeting of the World's protected area professionals will include assessment of the world's protected areas, their management and their future needs, and the international mechanisms that support them.

    (ii) CBD Conference of Parties: Protected areas as a tool for conservation and sustainable development will be one of the main issues discussed by the 7th Conference of Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity, when they meet in 2004, and will presumably also be discussed at the preceding SBSTTA meeting.

7. Outputs will include a state of the parks report (or reports), list of sites, and recommendations on future information collection, management and use programmes incorporating the needs and capacities of national and international agencies.

IV. Implementation and financing of the project

8. The UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Centre developed a series of concept and discussion papers which have been reviewed by the IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA), the expert body which brings together the world's protected areas professionals. The WCPA Steering Committee has agreed to play a strong role in helping to guide implementation of the project.

9. UNEP-WCMC and WCPA have together approached the key UN agencies (UNEP, FAO and UNESCO) directly seeking their support and greater involvement. The concept was subsequently presented to the Ecosystem Conservation Group at its meeting in Nairobi in May 2000, where it received wholehearted endorsement from the members.

10. IUCN has provided UNEP-WCMC with the financial support necessary to develop guidelines, work programmes, quality control strategies, etc, and to prepare and implement a funding strategy. Meanwhile UNEP is exploring opportunities for locating resources from within the UN system, and is considering options for appointing a Junior Professional Officer in Cambridge to work on the project.

11. The next stage will be to involve the secretariats of international agreement and programmes with an interest in protected areas, so that the whole project helps to meet their information needs, as well as promoting these agreements and programmes and providing an opportunity for integration and cross-comparison of information on the sites recognized by each.

12. Subsequent to this information will be compiled during 2002 from national and international sources using the agreed procedures and quality control measures, and in discussion with appropriate UN agencies and international agreement and programme secretariats. The analyses, lists and assessments will be published in various formats in 2003 and 2004 as input to the key meetings identified earlier.

ANNEX 3

**Identify ways to build on the related initiatives of others:
the Global Biodiversity Information Facility**

Concept Note

I.   The role and purpose of GBIF

1.   GBIF has been established through an intergovernmental process in order to enable users throughout the world to discover and put to use the vast quantities of global biodiversity data that exist. The agreed programme priorities of GBIF are to:
   • create an Internet-based catalogue of known names of species
   • digitize data on species information in museums and herbaria
   • create interoperability of databases and search engines for accessing these data
   • build capacity in nations for implementation of GBIF

II.   Participation in GBIF

2.   The GBIF Memorandum of Understanding allows for two types of participation, Voting Participants and Associate Participants. UNEP has been accepted as an Associate Participant in GBIF, and intends *inter alia* to contribute in the area of species information for implementation of MEAs.

3.   UNEP has identified as its GBIF "node" the UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Centre, which already conforms with GBIF's definition of a node. UNEP-WCMC will therefore:
   • take the lead in UNEP's operational involvement in the GBIF
   • participate in GBIF Board Meetings as an Associate Participant
   • ensure UNEP's compliance with the GBIG Memorandum of Understanding, including the responsibilities of a GBIF node
   • act as a focal point for the involvement of other UNEP divisions and agencies

III.   Objective of UNEP participation in GBIF

4.   UNEP, as the administrator of several multilateral environmental agreements on species or with a species component seeks, in cooperation with GBIF, to enhance the quality and quantity of species-specific information available to parties, secretariats and those who directly implement such international agreements.

5.   UNEP recognises the species information impediment to effective implementation of such MEAs and will enter into discussions with parties, secretariats and a range of other organizations to define and implement a "Joint Conventions Species Information Service" within the framework of GBIF.

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ANNEX 4

**Integrate information management at the international level:
Review existing information sources**

Progress Report

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I.   Introduction

1.   National governments need international biodiversity information for a variety of reasons, including, *inter alias*: to put national conditions and plans in perspective; to set priorities; for strategic planning and policy development; to effectively implement national obligations under MEAs; and to effectively respond to evolving global and regional issues.

2.   Since the development of GEMS in the 1970s there have been growing numbers of international efforts of environmental data assembly, integration and exchange, both regionally and globally. It is difficult for national governments seeking to utilize these networks and services to locate the best sources, and to decide which information systems or networks are most worthy of support and enhancement.

3.   A project has been initiated by the UK Department of Environment Transport and the Regions, called "Rationalization of International Nature Conservation Information Systems", with the intent of shedding light on the availability and suitability of information.

II.   Scope of the project

4.   The project is considering ways of rationalizing, and making better use international information networks, with the general objective of improving the Government policy development process in nature conservation, both domestically and internationally. All major information sources and services will be reviewed, especially those relevant to the biodiversity-related MEAs.

III.   Summary of project aims and expected outputs

5.   More specifically the project aims to:
*   compile information on information networks and services that deliver information relevant to nature conservation and biodiversity
*   critically assess the information holdings and analysis capacity of such agencies in the context of the needs of *policy making bodies of the UK government*
*   provide guidance on the most effective and efficient use of existing information sources for policy development
*   evaluate and make recommendations on the information organizations and networks that most merit future support and investment in the context of UK Government needs.

IV.   Implementation and financing of the project

6.   The project is financed by the UK government and will be executed by the UNEP-WCMC and the Orbis Institute, working in collaboration with UNEP GRID Arendal and the European Centre for Nature Conservation. The one-year project began in May 2001 and a series of interactive workshops are planned for early July 2001 to analyze information use and needs in the UK government.

ANNEX 5

**Integrate information management at the international level:
ECOLEX**

Concept Note

I.   Introduction

1.   Government officials, lawyers, academics, non-governmental organisations, and researchers need to locate and analyse legal instruments and materials related to environmental management. Recognising the necessity for a single gateway to this information, the UNEP Governing Council (Decision 18/9) called upon UNEP and IUCN to join forces in providing access to international and national environmental law information.

II.   Summary of progress to date

2.   ECOLEX was designed to use IUCN's Environmental Law Information System as its core archival system and link this data to full text information available with UNEP's Computerised Environmental Law Information Base and other authoritative sources.

3.   Users can search using subject area, keyword, country, or date. ECOLEX includes information on multilateral treaties; national legislation; European Union instruments; international "soft law" and related documents; law and policy literature; and judicial decisions.

4.   The service is designed to provide users with access to: a locator mechanism; a distributed system of specialized environmental law information databases; two levels of Internet access (general and specialized); products such as CD-ROMs, disk-based information and paper publications; and links to other databases, expertise and more information.

5.   The full-suite of the prototype ECOLEX databases is now available on the Internet for a limited period. Included are references and full-text, where available, of multilateral treaties, national legislation, EU instruments, soft-law documents, law and policy literature, court decisions, and fauna and flora protection under international and national law.

III.   Future development

Add this section based on the outcome of the steering committee meeting in The Hague at the end of last year, which also reviewed the project document for phase two of the project. Need input from Mr. Alexandre Timoshenko (UNEP) who is chair of the ECOLEX Steering Committee. Content needs to be oriented to incorporation of FAOLEX (i.e. further integration) and ways in which the service can be improved (and integrated with other services) to serve the needs of the MEAs.

ANNEX 6

Integrate information management at the international level:
Species information

Concept Note

I.   Introduction

1.   Individual species are listed in the annexes to CITES and CMS, the Bern Convention and the EC Birds and Habitats Directives. Many other organisations also deliver species information over the Internet, including IUCN, UNEP (especially UNEP-WCMC) and numerous national agencies. In addition programmes on specific issues also deliver information such as the Global Register of Migratory Species, the Global Invasive Species Programme and the Association for Biodiversity Information. Collaborative programmes need to be developed to use the power of the Internet to link information in a manner that is useful.

II.   Objective

2.   To develop distributed and integrated information systems based on existing services and programmes that serve the needs of a wide range of international agreements and programmes.

III.   Proposed activities

3.   Review the information on species already available to convention and programme secretariats, and plan ways to make it more accessible on the Internet.

4.   Review the information already managed by organizations and programme such as UNEP-WCMC, ECOLEX and the European Environment Agency, to identify the best means to link the species information made available by convention secretariats to convention appendices and annexes, taking account of the need to deal with differences in accepted taxonomies.

5.   Identify other information sources on species which could be readily linked to this information, or which could be modified to do so.

6.   Review with convention secretariats and technical bodies the information that is required to support policy development for implementation of the different agreements in a synergistic manner.

7.   Implement in a staged manner information services on the Internet that support implementation of international agreements at national and international levels.

ANNEX 7

Improve access to the experience of others

Concept Note

I.   Objective

1.   The objective is to promote and facilitate the sharing of experience from case studies, whether positive success stories or examples of what to avoid. A number of the MEAs currently have some of the case studies available through the Internet, but there is little consistency in this – even within one MEA, and no uniform way of searching for relevant case studies across conventions. The objective is to integrate case studies called for under a range of international agreements and programmes into an effective "Lessons Learned Library".

II.   Proposed activities

A.   *All MEAs make case-studies available through the internets*

2.   This requires an internal review in each secretariat to select appropriate material from project files, national reports and nomination submissions, responses to previous calls for case studies, and so on. These would be posted on a special section of the convention web site.

B.   *Develop tools for integrated access across MEAs*

3.   This will require improved means of identifying the content of the material in a consistent way, including a standard "cover sheet", standardisation for country and region identification, and more specialised key-wording vocabulary for these lessons learned – for instance, incorporating a standard taxonomy and more detailed terms related to habitat rehabilitation, management plans, threat mitigation and other specific items.

C.   *Establish a prototype lessons-learned web site*

4.   This could be developed as a separate web site or as part of an inter-convention web site and would serve to test the methodology and delivery of information, and to attract input from other agencies.

D.   *Further implementation*

5.   The most valuable lessons-learned will be from national activities, and so establishing links to the lessons-learned case studies of national sites is a logical next step. To encourage this, a set of themes could be drawn up (e.g. for Best Practice Guidelines for CITES implementation for new parties and others) and efforts would be made to collect relevant material from the Parties in the short term. From the experience of Ramsar, once a prototype site is established, national and international agencies are willing to submit additional material and/or provide links to existing sites with case studies and examples of good practice. Guidelines must be developed for acceptance of lessons-learned or links.

6.   Finally, the Lessons-Leaned site could be linked to the CBD Clearing House Mechanism following the testing of the prototype and adjustment according to experience. The ultimate goal is that the lessons-learned network becomes a useful node in the overall CBD Clearing-House Mechanism.

ANNEX 8

Ensure that national reports and assessment together cover the "Big Picture"

Concept Note

I.   Introduction

1.   For many years now, national reports have been flowing into the MEAs with the main purpose of enabling the assessment of the state and effectiveness of the implementation of the particular treaty. However, it is not currently clear to what extent national reporting to the suite of MEAs provides the "big picture" either of the collective degree of effectiveness of the treaties, or of the overall global status of biodiversity?

II.   Objective

2.   The aim is to review the reporting requirements of the key international agreements, with a view to identifying how the range of reports presents the "big picture", that is a global overview, and what else would be required to complete it.

III.   Proposed activities

3.   The first stage is to conduct a study that will examine the information content of the national reporting requirements against a framework of issues of concern in biodiversity and nature conservation. The analysis could be expressed through one or more matrices of information elements verses the particular MEAs and the perceived information needs. A summary matrix would indicate the range of information required and the extent to which it presents a complete picture of the state and issues of global biodiversity.

4.   Once established this matrix would lead to recommendations on improving and streamlining reporting, including:
     - areas of duplication
     - additional reporting elements required
     - areas where existing treaties or treaty provisions area inadequate
     - opportunities for rationalisation of treaties

5.   The resulting information would then be reviewed by an expert meeting involving both convention secretariats and contracting parties to different MEAs, who would confirm (or otherwise) the project findings, and recommend ways to implement the recommendations.

6.   A further stage would be to also look at the ways in which international assessment processes and programmes such as the Millenium Assessment, GEO, GIWA and the Forest Resouces Assessment also contribute, and the extent to which these assessments are acceptable to contracting parties in assessing the status of biological diversity.

ANNEX 9

Organized inventory of obligations

Progress Report

I. Introduction

1. The concept is to develop a detailed consolidated inventory of all obligations placed on contracting parties to report information to international conventions. This database could then provide the basis for analysis of duplication and potential synergies.

II. Scope of the project

2. The project would cover all reporting obligations, both legal and moral, relating to international agreements and programmes, including questionnaires and requests for statistical information.

III. Project summary and expected outputs

3. The information would be compiled in the form of an annotated list of specific "questions" or information elements demanded (directly or implicitly) by each obligation instrument (convention, protocol, agreement, directive, etc).

4. While not replacing the detailed format and reporting instructions of the convention secretariats, the questions would be as specific as possible in indicating the nature of the information element required. The questions would be key-worded using a standardised thesaurus as to subject matter, and linked to data on schedule and periodicity of regular reports.

5. The inventory would be structured as a searchable database that links the questions to the text of the legal authority for the obligation (e.g. convention article or formal decision) and to geographic scope.

6. The resulting database would facilitate analysis of reporting requirements.

IV. Implementation and financing of the project

7. This project is being carried out by the European Environment Agency for all of the environmental agreements and questionnaires that relate to European Union countries.

ANNEX 10

"Handbook" to reporting, incorporating existing formats, rationale and timetables

Concept Note

1. Reporting instructions for contracting parties vary widely between treaties. Contents specification, reporting formats, guidance and interpretation may be found in convention articles, decisions and resolutions of conferences of the parties and subsidiary bodies, and less formal guidelines and interpretation documents circulated by secretariats. Focal point agencies may often be unsure if they are using the most up-to-date instructions or formats for a particular reporting obligation, and countries often find it difficult to obtain an overview of the range of reporting requirements to which they must respond.

2. A "handbook" that provides in one place access to the relevant guidelines and formats for a range of biodiversity-related conventions (ideally all) would be of great day-to-day practical benefit, as well as being a tool to promote harmonisation.

3. The primary objective would be to make national reporting to conventions easier and of improved quality and consistency by ensuring that the most up-to-date instructions are readily available

4. The "handbook" would also potentially:
   (i)   identify opportunities for harmonisation of reporting frameworks and approaches
   (ii)   assist in identifying gaps and overlaps in reporting, and opportunities for streamlining
   (iii) encourage the adoption of standards for vocabulary and nomenclature and provide a convenient means of disseminating such guidance

5. The "handbook" could be made more useful by the addition of an overview section on good practices in information management. This could suggest how contracting parties could most usefully organise national information systems and collection regimes for reporting to the conventions while contributing to their own national polices, strategies and action plans.

6. The "handbook" could begin as a simple compilation of existing guidance documents, either in paper format or as a series of weblinks. This would be of immediate practical value. The "handbook" could then be used as a tool to consolidate, harmonise and rationalise reporting structures and evolve in stages to a guide for modular reporting and/or virtual reporting.

7. The "handbook" would have the following essential characteristics:
   (i)   reporting requirements, formats and other guidance for all treaties compiled in one document
   (ii)   must be updated whenever changes in requirements are mandated by the authoritative treaty bodies
   (iii) would be widely and easily accessible.

8. The "handbook" would have the following useful characteristics:
   (i)   website with links to all formats and guidelines
   (ii)   provision of blank pro-forma reporting formats, and links to sites where sample completed reports can be obtained would be useful.
   (iii) common glossary, acronym list, terminology set and cross-convention standards
   (iv)   integrated schedule of reporting due dates

ANNEX 11

All national reports accessible on the Internet

Concept Note

I.   Objectives

1.   Improve the usefulness of national reports to all stakeholders by ensuring that all reports are available and easily accessed on the Internet.

II.   Proposed activities

2.   Each MEA undertakes actions to place electronic version of all national reports submitted on the Internet, including consideration of the extent to which capture of the previous backlog should be attempted.

3.   Develop tools to effectively search the material across conventions. This will require improved means of identifying the content of the reports in a consistent way, e.g. by adopting a standard thesaurus such as ENVOC for keywording the reports, a standard "cover sheet", standardization for country and region identification.

4.   Coordinate between the MEAs to ensure that the formats and information technology regimes are sufficiently similar to allow search engines to operate.

5.   Establish a common web-site or entry portal that will enable searching and selecting reports across the MEAs.

ANNEX 12

Metadatabase of official document and information papers of MEAs

Concept Note

I. Introduction

1. A metadatabase refers to an automated searchable index or directory of information about information - a means to search and locate available documents across a range of custodians.

2. Many, but not all, MEAs currently make national reports and some secretariat documents available electronically, but systems vary and there is no way to search across MEAs for information - for instance by issue, or action or species. Having a metadatabase would greatly improve the access and usefulness of national reports. The concept is that this catalogue would extend to all relevant documents, not only national reports and case studies, whether in electronic form or on paper.

II. Objective

3. To facilitate availability and exchange of information from MEAs and inter-linkages between MEAs by developing a metadatabase that covers all MEA official documents – those submitted by parties, and those related to governance of the convention.

III. Proposed activities

4. The anticipated activities would include the following:
   - design a the structure content and format for a metadatabase
   - adopt standard thesauri (shared between the conventions)
   - adopt standards for geographic identification (consistent country and region naming, etc)
   - adopt standards for document naming and numbering (meeting minutes, decisions, resolutions, background papers, membership lists, etc)
   - keyword all reports for subject matter content using the standard thesaurus
   - add to the metadatabase information on how to obtain or access the reports (in both electronic and paper form)
   - develop cooperative processes to maintain and manage the metadatabase jointly, through a central web-site

5. Searching for information that is relevant to a particular inquiry would then be a simple operation which could be conducted from one common point, with the option to include or exclude documents pertaining to specific conventions or time periods. This would lead naturally to increased harmonisation of information management practices generally between the MEAs.

ANNEX 13

Harmonization of terminology and classification

Concept Note

1. Harmonisation of the terminology (both technical and administrative) between the conventions would provide a number of benefits, including enabling useful on-line searches, and effective metadatabases, and as well contribute to improved understanding and communication of information.

2. Areas in need of harmonisation or standardisation include:
    *   country naming and coding
    *   region naming and coding
    *   official/legal terminology (*party, accession, signatory, nomination, listed, etc*)
    *   ecological classification systems and terms (*ecosystems, bio-geographic zones, wetland and vegetation classification, land-use and land cover, etc*)
    *   taxonomy - to the extent possible adopt standard species names, spelling etc
    *   protection level
    *   species status (*endangered, threatened, etc*)
    *   keywording vocabulary
    *   abbreviations

3. In many cases it should be possible to adopt an existing terminology set, such as the ENVOC vocabulary for keywording, IUCN protection categories for protected areas, and so on.

4. In other cases, such as species taxonomy, finding a standard, or even a harmonized approach will take longer and rather more adjustment.

5. Guidance and tools to assist parties to adopt these conventions will also be needed and should be developed through interagency co-operation.

ANNEX 14

Demonstrations of streamlined reporting through electronic means

Concept Note

I.   Introduction

1.   Various MEA secretariats are already experimenting with the use of "electronic" means of submitting reports, including on diskette and using web forms. At the same time countries are increasingly using national websites for delivering information at the national level.

2.   Contracting parties to each international agreement periodically *submit* a report to the convention secretariat. This is so whether the report is "hard copy" or a computer file, and whether it is sent through the post or by email. The concept of "virtual reporting" has also been proposed, where no report is submitted, rather the information that comprises the report is made available for access by the convention secretariat. This would be done through a linked series of pages on a national website. Secretariats would access the information relevant to them as and when required.

3.   An important secondary benefit is the creation of a multi-purpose national information resource that is constantly up-dated and available for research and education, as well as for national policy implementation. It could easily be linked to national SoE processes.

II.   Objective

4.   The pilot projects and demonstrations described here aim to build on this experience, in particular to:

(i)   promote the sharing of experience relating to submission using electronic media

(ii)   demonstrate the potential value and application of "virtual reporting"

III.   Proposed activities/Pilot studies

6.   The anticipated activities would include the following:
- encourage the submission of national reports on electronic media, especially in proforma formats established by the MEA
- review the effectiveness of trials of direct submission of reports as email attachments, in lieu of paper or electronic media
- pilot test the establishment of a national websites (or linked network of sites) for assembling national reports to international conventions and programmes. At its simplest, the website would simply hold electronic copies of the reports required in order to comply with international agreements.
- conduct further pilot tests of which would see the convention secretariat accessing the site (on instructions form the Party) to obtain the information needed for meeting reporting obligations, i.e. moving towards full "virtual reporting".

ANNEX 15

Mechanisms for improving institutional interlinkages

Recommendations

1. It is clear that achieving and maintaining the desired harmonisation will require on-going means for the five Convention Secretariats to exchange views and co-ordinate actions at the working level, especially with regard to information systems and harmonisation of reporting. This can be achieved in a number of ways, including standing committees, working groups, advisory groups, and shared service providers. The following are some suggestions for the key processes:

    A. *Co-ordination of scientific methodology considerations and the use of nomenclature, definitions, harmonisation of taxonomies, etc.*

2. <u>Suggestion</u>: A joint Scientific Advisory Committee to address issues of harmonisation of taxonomies, species lists, and scientific methodologies. This shared committee could be considered as scientific advisors to all the Conventions - for instance providing advice to the SBSTTA of CBD. The participation of appropriate international NGOs is also suggested. In addition this Scientific Committee could convene a sub-committee to deal with issues of harmonisation of nomenclature and scientific definitions.

    B. *Developing or adopting a consistent terminology, thesaurus and key word structure*

3. <u>Suggestion</u>: This could be a specific task for the above noted sub-committee, with the assistance of an international NGO familiar with thesaurus and metadatabase issues.

    C. *Harmonisation and inter-linking of Web-sites and other forms of information dissemination, developing and maintaining guidelines on virtual reporting sites, and management of a shared lessons-learned library*

4. <u>Suggestion</u>: A joint Working Group on Information Technology consisting of the "information officers" or "IT Managers" of each convention, with the assistance of a shared international information manager and/or technology consultant. There would seem to be considerable advantage to having an external agency manage the tasks required, under the direction of the Working Group.

    D. *Developing and co-ordinating a joint capacity building programme in information management and related Internet technology (process d above)*

5. <u>Suggestion</u>: A joint working group, which identifies common capacity building needs, seeks shared funding, and engages shared resources to implement capacity building programmes.